



Lud. Cheron inv.

Essay on Criticism.

Sam. Gribelin Jun. Sculp.



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AN
ESSAY
ON
CRITICISM.

Written by Mr. POPE.

*— Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum. HOR.*

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L O N D O N:

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V A 3 2 E

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM



ESSAY
ON
CRITICISM.



IS hard to say, if greater want
of skill.
Appear in writing or in judg-
ing ill;
But of the two, less dang'rous
is th' offence

To tire our patience than mislead our sense:

Some few in that, but numbers err in this,

Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss.

6 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

A Fool might once himself alone expose,
Now one in verse makes many more in prose.

'Tis with our judgment as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
In Poets as true Genius is but rare,
True Taste as seldom is the Critic's share;
Both must alike from heav'n derive their light,
These born to judge, as well as those to write.
Let * such teach others who themselves excel,
And censure freely who have written well.
Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,
But are not Critics to their judgment too?

YET if we look more closely we shall find
Most † have the seeds of judgment in their mind:

* Qui scribit artificiose, ab aliis commode scripta facile intelligere poterit. Cic. ad Herenn. lib. 4.

† Omnes tacito quodam sensu, sine ulla arte aut ratione, quæ sint in artibus ac rationibus recta ac prava dijudicant. Cic. de Orat. lib. 3.

ESSAY on CRITICISM. 7

Nature affords at least a glimm'ring light;
 The lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.
 But as the slightest sketch, if justly trac'd,
 Is by ill colouring but the more disgrac'd,
 So by false learning is good sense defac'd;
 Some are bewilder'd in the maze of schools,
 And some made Coxcombs nature meant but Fools.
 In search of wit these lose their common sense,
 And then turn Critics in their own defence;
 Those hate as rivals all that write; and others
 But envy wits as eunuchs envy lovers.
 All such have still an itching to deride,
 And fain would be upon the laughing side:
 If *Mævi*us scribble in *Apollo's* spight,
 There are, who judge still worse than he can write.

SOME have at first for Wits, then Poets past,
 Turn'd Critics next, and prov'd plain Fools at last.
 Some neither can for Wits nor Critics pass,
 As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.

8 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Those half-learn'd wittlings, num'rous in our isle,
As half-form'd insects on the banks of Nile,
Unfinish'd things, one knows not what to call,
Their generation's so equivocal;
To tell 'em would a hundred tongues require,
Or one vain Wit's that might a hundred tire.

But you who seek to give and merit fame,
And justly bear a Critic's noble name,
Be sure your self and your own reach to know,
How far your genius, taste, and learning go,
Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet,
And mark that point where sense and dulness meet.
Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit,
And wisely curb'd proud man's pretending wit.
As on the land while here the Ocean gains,
In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains;
Thus in the soul while memory prevails,
The solid pow'r of understanding fails;

Those

A A

Where

ESSAY on CRITICISM. 9

Where beams of warm imagination play,
The memory's soft figures melt away.
One science only will one genius fit;
So vast is art, so narrow human wit:
Not only bounded to peculiar arts,
But oft' in those confin'd to single parts.
Like Kings we lose the conquest gain'd before,
By vain ambition still to make them more.
Each might his sev'ral province well command,
Would all but stoop to what they understand.

FIRST follow Nature, and your judgment frame
By her just standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of art.
Art from that fund each just supply provides,
Works without show, and without pomp presides:

When to reprove, and when indulge our rights!
In

10 ESSAY on CRITICISM.

In some fair body thus the secret soul
With spirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,
Each motion gives, and ev'ry nerve sustains,
Itself unseen, but in th' effects remains.
There are whom heav'n has blest with store of wit,
Yet want as much again to manage it;
For wit and judgment ever are at strife,
Tho' meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's steed;
Restrain his fury, than provoke his speed;
The winged courser, like a gen'rous horse,
Shows most true mettle when you check his course.

THOSE Rules of old discover'd, not devis'd,
Are nature still, but nature methodiz'd:
Nature, like monarchy, is but restrain'd
By the same laws which first herself ordain'd.
HEAR how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,
When to repress, and when indulge our flights!

High

ESSAY ON CRITICISM II

High on *Parnassus*' top her sons she show'd,
And pointed out those arduous paths they trod,
Held from afar, aloft, th' immortal prize,
And urg'd the rest by equal steps to rise.
Just * precepts thus from great examples giv'n,
She drew from them what they deriv'd from heav'n.
The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire,
And taught the world, with reason to admire.
Then Criticism the Muse's handmaid prov'd,
To dress her charms and make her more belov'd:
But following Wits from that intention stray'd;
Who could not win the mistress, woo'd the maid,
Set up themselves, and drove a sep'rate trade;
Against the Poets their own arms they turn'd,
Sure to hate most the men from whom they learn'd.

* *Nec enim artibus editis factum est ut argumenta inveniremus, sed dicta sunt omnia antequam precipere-
rentur, mox ea scriptores observata & collecta ceciderunt,*
Quintil.

12 ESSAY *on* CRITICISM.

So modern 'Pothecaries taught the art
By Doctor's bills to play the Doctor's part,
Bold in the practice of mistaken rules,
Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.
Some on the leaves of ancient authors prey,
Nor time nor moth's e'er spoild so much as they.
Some drily plain, without invention's aid,
Write dull receipts how Poems may be made.
These lost the sense, their learning to display,
And those explain'd the meaning quite away.

You then whose judgment the right course would ^{(steer,}
Know well each Ancient's proper character;
His fable, subject, scope of ev'ry page;
Religion, country, genius of his age:
Without all these at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticise.

Be *Homer's* Works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night,

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 13

Thence form your judgment, thence your notions
And trace the Muses upward to their spring;^{(bring,}
Still with itself compar'd, his text peruse;
And let your comment be the *Mantuan* Muse.

* WHEN first young *Maro* sung of Kings and Wars,
'Ere warning *Phæbus* touch'd his trembling ears,
Perhaps he seem'd above the Critic's law,
And but from nature's fountains scorn'd to draw:
But when t' examine ev'ry part he came,
Nature and *Homer* were, he found, the same:
Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold design;
And rules as strict his labour'd work confine,
As if the *Stagyrite* o'erlook'd each line.
Learn hence for antient rules a just esteem;
To copy nature is to copy them.

* Virgil. Eclog. 6.

*Cum canerem Reges & Prælia, Cynthia aurem
Vellit.*

SOME

14 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Some beauties yet no precepts can declare,
 For there's a happiness as well as care:
 Music resembles Poetry, in each
 Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
 And which a master-hand alone can reach.
 If, * where the rules not far enough extend,
 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)
 Some lucky licence answers to the full
 Th' intent propos'd, that licence is a rule.
 Thus *Pegasus*, a nearer way to take,
 May boldly deviate from the common track.
 Great Wits sometimes may gloriously offend,
 And rise to faults true Critics dare not mend;
 From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,
 And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art.

* *Neque tam sancta sunt ista Præcepta, sed hoc quicquid est, Utilitas excogitavit; non negabo autem sic utile esse plerumque; verum si eadem illa nobis aliud suadebit Utilitas, hanc, relictis magistrorum autoritatibus, sequemur.*
 Quintil. lib. 2. cap. 13.

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 15

Which, without passing thro' the judgment, gains
The heart, and all its end at once attains.
In prospects, thus, some objects please our eyes,
Which out of nature's common order rise,
The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice.
But care in Poetry must still be had,
It asks discretion ev'n in running mad:
And tho' the Ancients thus their rules invade,
(As Kings dispense with laws themselves have made)
Moderns beware, or if you must offend
Against the Precept, ne'er transgress its End;
Let it be seldom, and compell'd by need,
And have, at least, their precedent to plead.
The Critic else proceeds without remorse,
Seizes your fame, and puts his Laws in force.
[thoughts
I know there are, to whose presumptuous
Those freer beauties, ev'n in them, seem faults.

Some

16 ESSAY on CRITICISM.

Some figures monstrous and mis-shap'd appear,
 Consider'd singly, or beheld too near,
 Which, but proportion'd to their light, or place,
 Due distance reconciles to form and grace.
 A prudent chief not always must display,
 His pow'rs in equal ranks, and fair array,
 But with th' occasion and the place comply,
 Conceal his force, may seem sometimes to fly.
 Those oft' are stratagems which errors seem,
 Nor is it *Homér* nods, but we that dream.

STILL green with bays each ancient altar stands,
 Above the reach of sacrilegious hands,
 Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
 Destructive war, and all-devouring age,
 See, from each clime the learn'd their incense bring;
 Hear, in all tongues consenting *Pæans* ring!
 In praise so just let ev'ry voice be join'd,
 And fill the gen'ral Chorus of mankind!

Hail,

ESSAY *on* CRITICISM. II 71

Hail, Bards triumphant! born in happier days;
Immortal heirs of universal praise!
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow!
Nations unborn your mighty names shall sound,
And worlds applaud that must not yet be found!
Oh may some spark of your celestial fire
The last, the meanest of your sons inspire,
(That on weak wings from far pursues your flights;
Glow while he reads, but trembles as he writes)
To teach vain Wits a science little known,
T' admire superior sense, and doubt their own!

OF all the causes which conspire to blind
Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,
What the weak head with strongest bias rules,
Is Pride, the never-failing vice of fools.
Whatever nature has in worth deny'd,
She gives in large recruits of needful pride;

18 ESSAY on CRITICISM.

For as in bodies, thus in souls, we find
What wants in blood and spirits, swell'd with wind:
Pride, where Wit fails, steps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense!
If once right reason drives that cloud away,
Truth breaks upon us with resistless day:
Trust not your self; but your defects to know,
Make use of ev'ry friend—and ev'ry foe.

A LITTLE Learning is a dang'rous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the *Pierian* spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.
Fir'd at first sight with what the Muse imparts,
In fearless youth we tempt the heights of Arts,
While from the bounded level of our mind,
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;
But more advanc'd, behold with strange surprize
New distant scenes of endless science rise!

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 192

So pleas'd at first the tow'ring Alps we try,
Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky;
Th' eternal snows appear already past,
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last;
But those attain'd, we tremble to survey
The growing labours of the lengthen'd way,
Th' increasing prospect tires our wand'ring eyes;
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!

* A PERFECT Judge will read each work of wit
With the same spirit that its Author writ,
Survey the whole, nor seek slight faults to find,
Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,
The gen'rous pleasure to be charm'd with wit.
But in such lays as neither ebb, nor flow,
Correctly cold, and regularly low,

* *Diligenter legendum est, ac pene ad scribendi sollicitudinem: Nec per partes modo scrutanda sunt omnia, sed perfectus liber utique ex integro resumendus. Quintil.*

20 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

That shunning faults, one quiet tenour keep;
We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep.
In wit, as nature, what affects our hearts
Is not th' exactness of peculiar parts;
'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.
Thus, when we view some well-proportion'd dome,
(The world's just wonder, and ev'n thine O *Rome!*)
No single parts unequally surprise;
All comes united to th' admiring eyes;
No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;
The whole at once is bold and regular.

WHOEVER thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In ev'ry work regard the writer's End,
Since none can compass more than they intend;
And if the means be just, the conduct true,
Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due.

ESSAY on CRITICISM. 21

As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,
T' avoid great errors must the less commit.
Neglect the rules each verbal Critic lays,
For not to know some trifles, is a praise.
Most Critics fond of some subservient art,
Still make the whole depend upon a part;
They talk of principles, but notions prize,
And all to one lov'd Folly sacrifice.

ONCE on a time, *La Mancha's* Knight, they say,
A certain Bard encount'ring on the way,
Discours'd in terms as just, with looks as sage,
As e'er could *Dennis* of the laws o'th stage;
Concluding all were desp'rate fots and fools,
That durst depart from *Aristotle's* rules.
Our author, happy in a judge so nice,
Produc'd his Play, and begg'd the Knight's advice;
Made him observe the subject and the plot,
The manners, passions, unities, what not?

122 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

All which, exact to rule, were brought about,
Were but a combate in the lists left out.

"What! leave the combate out?" ^(knight.) exclaims the

Yes, or we must renounce the *Stagyrite*.

"Not so by heav'n" (he answers in a rage)

"Knights, squires, and steeds, must enter on the" ^(stage.)

The stage can ne'er so vast a throng contain.

"Then build a new, or act it in a Plain."

Thus Critics, of less judgment than caprice,

Curious, not knowing, not exact, but nice,

Form short Ideas; and offend in arts

(As most in manners) by a love to parts.

Some to Conceit alone their taste confine,

And glitt'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line;

Pleas'd with a work where nothing's just or fit;

One glaring Chaos and wild heap of wit.

Poets like painters, thus, unskill'd to trace

The naked nature and the living grace,

With

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 23

With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part,
And hide with Ornaments their want of art,
True* wit is nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft' was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;
Something, whose truth convinc'd at sight we find,
That gives us back the image of our mind:
As shades more sweetly recommend the light,
So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit:
For works may have more wit than does 'em good,
As bodies perish through excess of blood.

OTHERS for Language all their care express,
And value books, as women men, for Dress:
Their praise is still—the Style is excellent:
The Sense, they humbly take upon content.
Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

* *Naturam intueamur, hanc sequamur; id facillime accipiunt animi quod agnoscunt.* Quintil. lib. 8. c. 3.

24 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

False Eloquence, like the Prismatic glass,
 Its gaudy colours spreads on ev'ry place ;
 The face of nature we no more survey,
 All glares alike, without distinction gay :
 But true Expression, like th' unchanging Sun,
 Clears, and improves whate'er it shines upon,
 It gilds all objects, but it alters none.
 Expression is the dress of thought, and still
 Appears more decent, as more suitable ;
 A vile conceit in pompous words express'd,
 Is like a clown in regal purple dress'd :
 For diff'rent styles with diff'rent subjects sort,
 As several garbs with country, town, and court.
 Some* by Old words to fame have made pretence :
 Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense !

* *Abolita & abrogata retinere, insolentia cujusdam est, & frivola in parvis jactantia. Quintil. lib. 1. c. 6.*

Opus est ut Verba a vetustate repetita neque crebra sint, neque manifesta; quia nil est odiosius affectatione, nec utique ab ultimis repetita temporibus. Oratio cujus summa virtus est perspicuitas, quam sit vitiosa si egeat interprete? Ergo ut novorum optima erunt maxime vetera, ita veterum maxime nova. Idem.

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 25

Such labour'd nothings, in so strange a style,
 Amaze th' unlearn'd, and make the learned smile.
 Unlucky, as *Fungoso* in the* Play,
 These sparks with aukward vanity display
 What the fine Gentlemen wore Yesterday :
 And but so mimic ancient wits at best,
 As apes our grandfires, in their doublets drest.
 In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold;
 Alike fantastic, if too new, or old;
 Be not the first by whom the new are try'd,
 Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

† But most by Numbers judge a Poet's song,
 And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong;

* Ben. Johnson's *Every Man in his humour*.

† Persius sat. 1.

*Quis populi sermo est? quis enim? nisi carmine molli
 Nunc demum numero fluere ut per læve severos
 Effugit junctura unguis: scit tendere versum;
 Non secus ac si oculo rubricam dirigat uno.*

In

26 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

In the bright Muse tho' thousand charms conspire,
 Her Voice is all these tuneful fools admire;
 Who haunt *Parnassus* but to please their ear,
 Not mend their minds; as some to Church repair,
 Not for the doctrine, but the music there.
 These equal syllables alone require,
 Tho' * oft' the ear the open vowels tire;
 While expletives their feeble aid do join;
 And ten low words oft' creep in one dull line;
 While they ring round the same unvary'd chimes,
 With sure returns of still-expected rhymes.
 Where-e'er you find the cooling western breeze,
 In the next line, it whispers thro' the trees;
 If crystals streams with pleasing murmurs creep,
 The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with sleep.
 Then, at the last, and only couplet fraught
 With some unmeaning thing they call a Thought,

* *Fugiemus crebras vocalium concursiones, quæ vastam
 atque hiantem orationem reddunt.* Cic. ad Herenn. lib. 4
Vide etiam Quintil. lib. 9. c. 4.

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 27

A needless *Alexandrine* ends the song,
 That like a wounded snake, drags its flow length a-^{(long,}
 Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know
 What's roundly smooth, or languishingly flow;
 And praise the easy vigor of a line,
 Where *Denham's* strength, and *Waller's* sweetness^{(join,}
 True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
 As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
 The sound must seem an echo to the sense.
 Soft is the strain when *Zephyr* gently blows,
 And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
 But when loud billows lash the sounding shore,
 The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.
 When *Ajax* strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
 The line too labours, and the words move slow;
 Not so, when swift *Camilla* scours the plain,
 Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the^{(main,}

Hear

28 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Hear how * *Timotheus*' various lays surprize,
And bid alternate passions fall and rise !
While, at each change, the son of *Libyan Jove*
Now burns with glory, and then melts with love :
Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,
Now sighs steal out, and tears begin to flow :
Persians and *Greeks* like turns of nature found,
And the World's victor stood subdu'd by Sound !
The pow'r of Music all our hearts allow ;
And what *Timotheus* was, is *Dryden* now.

Avoid Extreams ; and shun the fault of such,
Who still are pleas'd too little or too much.
At ev'ry trifle scorn to take offence,
That always shows great pride or little sense ;
Those heads, as stomachs, are not sure the best,
Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.

* *Alexander's Feast, or the power of Music ; An Ode*
by Mr. Dryden.

Yet

ESSAY on CRITICISM. 29

Yet let not each gay Turn thy rapture move,
For fools admire, but men of sense approve.

As things seem large which we thro' mists descry,
Dulness is ever apt to magnify.

SOME the French writers, some our own despise;
The ancients only, or the moderns prize.

(Thus Wit, like Faith, by each man is apply'd
To one small sect, and all are damn'd beside.)

Meanly they seek the blessing to confine,
And force that sun but on a part to shine,

Which not alone the southern wit sublimes,
But ripens spirits in cold northern climes;

Which from the first has shone on ages past,
Enlights the present, and shall warm the last.

(Tho' each may feel encreases and decays,
And see now clearer and now darker days)

Regard not then if wit be old or new,
But blame the false and value still the true.

SOME

30 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

SOME ne'er advance a judgment of their own,
But catch the spreading notion of the town;
They reason and conclude by precedent,
And own stale nonsense which they ne'er invent:
Some judge of authors names, not works, and then
Nor praise, nor blame the writings, but the men.
Of all this servile herd, the worst is he
That in proud dulness joins with Quality,
A constant Critic at the great man's board,
To fetch and carry nonsense for my Lord.
What woful stuff this madrigal would be,
In some starv'd hackny Sonneteer, or me?
But let a Lord once own the happy lines,
How the wit brightens, how the style refines!
Before his sacred name flies ev'ry fault,
And each exalted Stanza teems with thought!

THE Vulgar thus through imitation err;
As oft' the Learn'd by being singular;

ESSAY on CRITICISM. 31

So much they scorn the crowd, that if the throng
By chance go right, they purposely go wrong:
So Schismatics the plain believers quit,
And are but damn'd for having too much wit.

SOME praise at morning what they blame at night;
But always think the last opinion right.
A Muse by these is like a mistress us'd,
This hour she's idoliz'd, the next abus'd;
While their weak heads, like towns unfortify'd,
'Twixt sense and nonsense daily change their side.
Ask them the cause; they're wiser still, they say;
And still to morrow's wiser than to day.
We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow;
Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so.
Once School-divines this zealous isle o'erspread;
Who knew most Sentences was deepest read;
Faith, Gospel, all, seem'd made to be disputed,
And none had sense enough to be confuted:

32 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Scotists and *Thomists*, now, in peace remain,
 Amidst their kindred cobwebs in *Duck-lane*.
 If faith itself has different dresses worn,
 What wonder Modes in wit should take their turn?
 Oft' leaving what is natural and fit,
 The current folly proves our ready wit;
 And authors think their reputation safe,
 Which lives as long as fools are pleas'd to laugh.

SOME valuing those of their own side, or mind,
 Still make themselves the measure of mankind:
 Fondly we think we honour merit then,
 When we but praise our selves in other men.
 Parties of Wit attend on those of State,
 And publick faction doubles private hate.
 Pride, malice, folly, against *Dryden* rose,
 In various shapes of Parsons, Critics, Beaus;
 But sense surviv'd when merry jests were past;
 For rising merit will buoy up at last.

Might

ESSAY on CRITICISM. 33

Might he return, and bless once more our eyes,
 New *Blackmores* and new *Milbourns* must arise:
 Nay should great *Homer* lift his awful head,
Zoilus again would start up from the dead.
 Envy will merit, as its shade, pursue;
 But like a shadow, proves the substance true.
 For envy'd wit, like *Sol* eclips'd, makes known
 Th' opposing body's grossness, not its own.
 When first that sun too pow'ful beams displays,
 It draws up vapours which obscure its rays;
 But ev'n those clouds at last adorn its way,
 Reflect new glories, and augment the day.

BE thou the first true merit to befriend,
 His praise is lost, who stays till all commend.
 Short is the date, alas, of modern rhymes,
 And 'tis but just to let 'em live betimes.
 No longer now that golden age appears,
 When Patriarch wits surviv'd a thousand years;

C

Now

34 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Now length of fame (our second life) is lost,
 And bare threescore is all ev'n that can boast:
 Our sons their father's failing language see,
 And such as *Chaucer* is, shall *Dryden* be.
 So when the faithful pencil has design'd
 Some bright idea of the master's mind,
 Where a new world leaps out at his command,
 And ready nature waits upon his hand;
 When the ripe colours soften and unite,
 And sweetly melt into just shade and light,
 When mellowing years their full perfection give,
 And each bold figure just begins to live,
 The treach'rous colours the fair art betray,
 And all the bright creation fades away!

UNHAPPY Wit, like most mistaken things,
 Atones not for that envy which it brings.
 In youth alone its empty praise we boast,
 But soon the short-liv'd vanity is lost!

Like

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 35

Like some fair flow'r the early spring supplies,
That gayly blooms, but ev'n in blooming dies.
What is this wit which must our cares employ,
The owner's wife, that other men enjoy;
Still most our trouble when the most admir'd,
The more we give, the more is still requir'd:
The fame with pains we gain, but lose with ease;
Sure some to vex, but never all to please;
'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous shun,
By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone!

If wit so much from ign'rance undergo,
Ah let not learning too commence its foe!
Of old, those met rewards who could excel,
And such were prais'd who but endeavour'd well!
Tho' Triumphs were to Gen'als only due,
Crowns were reserv'd to grace the Soldiers too.
Now, they who reach *Parnassus*' lofty crown,
Employ their pains to spurn some others down.

36 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

And while self-love each jealous writer rules,
Contending wits become the sport of fools.
But still the worst with most regret commend,
For each ill Author is as bad a Friend.
To what base ends, and by what abject ways,
Are mortals urg'd thro' sacred lust of praise!
Ah ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,
Nor in the Critic let the Man be lost!
Good-nature and good sense must ever join;
To err is humane, to forgive, divine.
But if in noble minds some dregs remain,
Not yet purg'd off, of spleen and sow'r disdain,
Discharge that rage on more provoking crimes,
Nor fear a dearth in these flagitious times.
No pardon vile Obscenity should find,
Tho' wit and art conspire to move your mind;
But dulness with Obscenity must prove
As shameful sure as impotence in love.
In the fat age of pleasure, wealth and ease,
Sprung the rank weed, and thriv'd with large increase;

When

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 37

When Love was all an easy Monarch's care,
Seldom at council, never in a war:
Jilts rul'd the state, and statesmen farces writ;
Nay Wits had pensions, and young Lords had wit:
The fair fate panting at a Courtier's play,
And not a Mask went unimprov'd away:

The modest fan was lifted up no more,
And virgins smil'd at what they blush'd before—
The following licence of a foreign reign
Did all the dregs of bold *Socinus* drain;
Then first the *Belgian* morals were extoll'd;
We their religion had, and they our gold:
Then unbelieving Priests reform'd the nation,
And taught more pleasant methods of salvation;
Where heav'ns free subjects might their right dispute
Lest God himself should seem too absolute.
Pulpits their sacred satyr learn'd to spare,
And vice admir'd to find a flatt'rer there!
Encourag'd thus, wit's *Titans* brav'd the skies,
And the press groan'd with licenc'd blasphemies—

38 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

These monsters, Critics! with your darts engage,
Here point your thunder, and exhaust your rage!
Yet shun their fault, who, scandalously nice,
Will needs mistake an author into vice;
All seems infected that th' infected spy,
As all looks yellow to the jaundic'd eye.

LEARN then what Morals Critics ought to show,
For 'tis but half a judge's task to know.

'Tis not enough, wit, art, and learning join;
In all you speak let truth and candor shine:
That not alone what to your judgment's due,
All may allow; but seek your friendship too.

BE silent always when you doubt your sense;
And speak, tho' sure, with seeming diffidence:
Some positive, persisting fops we know,
That, if once wrong, will needs be always so;

But

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 39

But you with pleasure own your errors past,
And make each day a Critic on the last.

'Tis not enough, your counsel still be true;
Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do;
Men must be taught as if you taught them not,
And things unknown propos'd as things forgot.
Without good breeding truth is disapprov'd;
That only makes superior sense belov'd.

Be niggards of advice on no pretence;
For the worst avarice is that of sense.
With mean complacence ne'er betray your trust,
Nor be so civil as to prove unjust;
Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;
Those best can bear reproof who merit praise.

'TWERE well might Critics still this freedom take,
But *Appius* reddens at each word you speak,

40 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

And stares, tremendous, with a threatening eye,
Like some fierce Tyrant in old Tapestry!
Fear most to tax an honourable Fool,
Whose right it is, uncensur'd to be dull;
Such without wit are Poets when they please,
As without learning they can take degrees.
Leave dangerous truths to unsuccessful Satyrs,
And flattery to fulsome Dedicators,
Whom, when they praise the world believes no more,
Than when they promise to give scribbling o'er.
'Tis best sometimes your censure to refrain,
And charitably let the dull be vain.
Your silence there is better than your spite,
For who can rail so long as they can write?
Still humming on, their drowsy course they keep,
And lash'd so long, like Tops, are lash'd asleep.
False steps but help them to renew the race,
As after stumbling, Jades will mend their pace.
What crouds of these, impenitently bold,
In sounds and jingling syllables grown old,

Still

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 41

Still run on Poets, in a raging vein,
Ev'n to the dregs and squeezing of the brain;
Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense,
And rhyme with all the rage of Impotence!

SUCH shameless Bards we have; and yet 'tis true,
There are as mad, abandon'd Critics too.
The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head,
With his own tongue still edifices his ears,
And always list'ning to himself appears.
All books he reads, and all he reads assails,
From *Dryden's* Fables down to *D---y's* Tales.
With him, most authors steal their works, or buy;
Garth did not write his own *Dispensary*.
Name a new Play, and he's the Poet's friend,
Nay shew'd his faults--but when wou'd Poets mend?
No place so sacred from such fops is barr'd,
Nor is *Paul's* church more safe than *Paul's* church-
yard

Nay,
3

42 ESSAY ON CRITICISM

Nay, fly to altars; there they'll talk you dead;
 For fools rush in where Angels fear to tread.
 Distrustful sense with modest caution speaks,
 It still looks home, and short excursions makes;
 But rattling nonsense in full volleys breaks,
 And never shock'd, and never turn'd aside,
 Bursts out resistless, with a thund'ring tyde!

BUT where's the man, who counsel can bestow,
 Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
 Unbias'd, or by favour, or by spite;
 Not dully prepossess'd, or blindly right;
 Tho' learn'd, well-bread; and tho' well-bread,
 Modestly bold, and humanly severe?^(sincere)
 Who to a friend his faults can freely show,
 And gladly praise the merit of a foe?
 Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
 A knowledge both of books and humankind;
 Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
 And love to praise, with reason on his side?

SUCH

ESSAY ON CRITICISM 43

SUCH once were Critics; such the happy few,
Athens and *Rome* in better ages knew,
 The might *Stagyrite* first left the shore,
 Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;
 He steer'd securely, and discover'd far,
 Led by the light of the *Meonian* Star.
 Poets, a race long unconfin'd and free,
 Still fond and proud of savage liberty,
 Receiv'd his laws; and stood convinc'd 'twas fit,
 Who conquer'd Nature, should preside o'er Wit.

HORACE still charms with graceful negligence,
 And without method talks us into sense,
 Will like a friend, familiarly convey
 The truest notions in the easiest way.
 He, who supreme in judgment as in wit,
 Mighty boldly censure, as he boldly writ,
 Yet judg'd with coolness tho' he sung with fire.
 His precepts teach but what his works inspire.

44 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Our Critics take a contrary extreme,
They judge with fury, but they write with phlegm
Nor suffers *Horace* more in wrong Translations
By Wits, than Critics in as wrong Quotations.

SEE * *Dionysius* *Homer's* thoughts refine,
And call new beauties forth from ev'ry line!

FANCY and art in gay *Petronius* please.
The scholars learning, with the courtier's ease.*

IN grave *Quintilian's* copious work, we find
The justest rules, and clearest method join'd:
Thus useful arms in magazines we place,
All rang'd in order, and dispos'd with grace;
Nor thus alone the curious eye to please,
But to be found, when need requires, with ease.

* *Dionysius of Halicarnassus.*

THEE,

ESSAY on CRITICISM. 45

THEE, bold *Longibus*, all the Nine inspire,
And bless their Critic with a Poet's fire.
An ardent judge, who zealous in his trust,
With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just;
Whose one example strengthens all his laws,
And is himself that great Sublime he draws.

THUS long succeeding Critics justly reign'd,
Licence repress'd, and useful laws ordain'd.
Learning and *Rome* alike in empire grew,
And arts still follow'd where her Eagles flew.
From the same foes, at last, both felt their doom.
And the same age saw Learning fall, and *Rome*.
With tyranny, then superstition join'd,
As that the body, this enslav'd the mind;
Much was believ'd, but little understood,
And to be dull was constru'd to be good;
A second deluge learning thus o'er ruu,
And the *Monks* finish'd what the *Goths* begun.

At

46 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

At length *Erasmus*, that great, injur'd name,
(The glory of the Priesthood, and the shame !)
Stem'd the wild torrent of a barb'rous age,
And drove those Holy *Vandals* off the stage.

BUT see! each Muse, in *Leo's* golden days,
Starts from her trance, and trims her wither'd bays!
Rome's ancient *Genius*, o'er its ruins spread,
Shakes off the dust, and rears his rev'rent head!
Then Sculpture and her sister arts revive;
Stones leap'd to form, and rocks began to live;
With sweeter notes each rising Temple rung;
A *Raphael* painted, and a * *Vida* sung!
Immortal *Vida*! on whose honour'd brow
The Poet's bays and Critic's ivy grow.
Cremona now shall ever boast thy name,
As next in place to *Mantua*, next in fame!

* M. Hieronymus Vida, an excellent Latin Poet, who writ an art of Poetry in Verse. He flourish'd in the Time of *Leo the Tenth*.

BUT

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 47

BUT soon by impious arms from *Latium* chas'd,
Their ancient bounds the banish'd *Muses* past;
Thence arts o'er all the northern world advance;
But critic learning flourish'd most in *France*:
The rules, a nation born to serve, obeys;
And *Boileau* still in right of *Horace* sways.
But we, brave *Britons*, foreign laws despis'd,
And kept unconquer'd, and unciviliz'd;
Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,
We still defy the *Romans*, as of old.
Yet some there were, among the founder few
Of those who less presum'd, and better knew,
Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,
And here restor'd Wit's fundamental laws.
Such was the Muse, whose rules and practice tell,
*Nature's * chief master-piece is writing well.*
Such was *Roscommon*---not more learn'd than good,
With manner^s gen'rous as his noble blood;

* *Essay on Poetry*, by the Duke of Buckingham.

48 ESSAY *on* CRITICISM.

To him the wit of *Greece* and *Rome* was known:
And ev'ry author's merit but his own.
Such late was *Walsh*--the Muse's judge and friend,
Who justly knew to blame or to commend;
To failings mild, but zealous for desert;
The clearest Head, and the sincerest Heart.
This humble praise, lamented Shade! receive,
This praise at least a grateful Muse may give!
The Muse, whose early Voice you taught to sing,
Prescrib'd her heights, and prun'd her tender wing,
(Her guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,
But in low numbers short excursion tries,
Content, if hence th' unlearn'd their wants may view,
The learn'd reflect on what before they knew:
Careless of Censure, nor too fond of Fame,
Still pleas'd to praise, yet not afraid to blame;
Averse alike to flatter, or offend,
Nor free from faults, nor yet to vain to mend.

E I N I S.